

performances and never missed an opportunity to meet with Björling devotees and promote the Society.

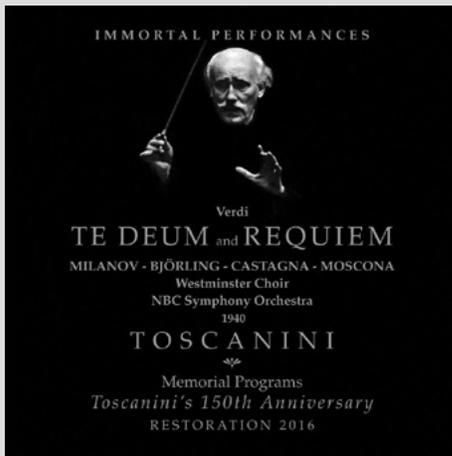
Dan was also heavily involved in operatic activities at the local level. He served on the board of Madison Opera, Opera for the Young, and the Madison Art Song Competition sponsored by the Yrjö Kilpinen Societies of North America and Finland.

Ever attuned to opportunities to enlist new members, Dan established email contacts across the country, and the world.

Past president Sue Flaster, recalls that “about five minutes after we had our first email contact, Dan mailed me a copy of a newspaper review of Jussi’s first American concert appearance in Springfield, Mass. That informed and immediate desire to share and help firmly attached me to the Jussi Björling Society at a time when I was full of interest but low on information. Not only did Dan know EVERYTHING, but he was happy to patiently pour it out. We’re both deeply emotional people, and in the

years we worked together on the JBS Board, we often noted how very much like family members we are...” That was Dan!

On the occasion of the Society’s 20th anniversary, and Dan’s eightieth birthday, it is important for us to recognize the man who was instrumental in giving it birth and whose energy, musical intelligence, unbridled love of the vocal arts, and devotion continue to sustain it in so many important ways. ■



Te Deum, Messa Da Requiem (Verdi)

Jussi Björling, Zinka Milanov; Bruna Castagna; Nicola Moscona; Westminster Choir and NBC Orchestra, Cond: Arturo Toscanini
Immortal Performances IPCD 1073-2 [2 CDs] 143 min.

It has been thought by some that, of all Toscanini’s performances of the Verdi *Requiem*, this was the most dispensable of them. This reaction is hard to believe, as it is still a vastly imposing performance with some excellent singing from voices that can easily cope with the demands, especially Jussi Björling and Zinka Milanov. Stephen Hastings, in his book *The Björling Sound*, describes the “spiritual concentration” of an earlier performance from Lucerne, Switzerland, recorded in the Jesuitenkirche. However that 1939 performance has, as far as I know, not been issued and it is also incomplete.

Our *Requiem* under review was presented as a benefit concert and has been successfully remastered by Richard Caniell as part of his Immortal Performances series. It has much more flexibility than

Toscanini’s commercial recording from 1951 and mixes the dramatic and lyrical parts of the work rather more successfully. As a result Toscanini takes over five minutes longer than in 1951.

The opening “Kyrie” has Jussi in fine voice and singing with such confidence it nearly makes you leap out of your seat. Milanov is hardly less expressive, with Moscona and Castagna not far behind. The “Dies irae” with its rasping brass and thwacks on the timpani come through the years on this new CD with terrifying impact. “Mors stupebit,” sung well enough by Moscona, does not equal the horror from Ezio Pinza in the famous 1939 *Requiem* conducted by Tullio Serafin. Bruna Castagna sings to the manner born and with fine Italianate tone but emits some strange sounds. In the Serafin recording, Ebe Stignani’s singing is simply flawless, bringing more voice, dignity and grandeur to her role.

“Quid sum miser” brings some lovely soft singing by Jussi especially at the second Quid. He is ardent in the “Rex tremendae,” easily heard at the final ‘Salva me.’ “Ingemisco” is well poised and well phrased and keeps to tempo at around three and a half minutes. Perhaps it lacks just that last degree of sweetness or even Italianita that Gigli brings, despite all the aitches! Björling’s commercial recording is longer by half a minute and does have a more spiritual atmosphere. In 1938, “Inter oves” is sung with a glorious head voice, building up to a strongly sung “parte dextra” with a tremendous rise to a soaring b-flat to finish. Two years later Jussi still sings “Inter oves” softly, but perhaps does not have the time to linger over phrases quite so subtly. In the Offertorio, the tenor blends very well with his colleagues and the Hostias is glorious, despite a slight frog in the throat at ‘Domine.’ Milanov’s soft singing is a thing of wonder here.

It is not clear if this performance was ever to be released commercially. Toscanini would probably have declined, as there are just a few errors, perhaps inevitable in a live performance. Embarrassingly, Jussi drops out entirely of “Lux aeterna” at 1:40 for just a second or two after an error and Milanov almost fluffs her floated b-flat in the “Libera me.” This is a shame, as she is particularly effective at the start and easily rides over both chorus and orchestra at the concerted passage near the end. Her dramatic ‘Libera me, Domine’ ends the work fittingly.

If you already have this 1940 *Requiem* from Music & Arts, who produced a fine version in 2012, why buy this new IP set? This IP restoration is simply in superb sound. It makes the M&A discs seem like there is a blanket over the sound. IP is better balanced and more open as well as brighter throughout, the voices coming out loud and clear with little distortion. It also has the concert in the right order and several spoken extras including a delightful reminiscence of Toscanini by soprano, Lotte Lehman. Congratulations to all at IP for such a magnificent new version of this splendidly sung Verdi’s *Requiem*.

—David Cutler, courtesy of THE RECORD COLLECTOR